Unit .01

Session .05

Sin and God's Authority

Scripture

Genesis 11:1-9

1 The whole earth had the same language and
vocabulary. **2** As people migrated from the east, they
found a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.
3 They said to each other, "Come, let us make oven-
fired bricks." (They used brick for stone and asphalt for
mortar.) **4** And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves
a city and a tower with its top in the sky. Let us make
a name for ourselves; otherwise, we will be scattered
throughout the earth." **5** Then the Lord came down
to look over the city and the tower that the humans
were building. **6** The Lord said, "If they have begun
to do this as one people all having the same language,
then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for
them. **7** Come, let's go down there and confuse their
language so that they will not understand one another's
speech." **8** So from there the Lord scattered them
throughout the earth, and they stopped building the
city. **9** Therefore it is called Babylon, for there the Lord
confused the language of the whole earth, and from
there the Lord scattered them throughout the earth.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Sin drives people to seek greatness for themselves instead of for God's glory.

Option 1

Write out the following words on index cards or small pieces of paper: *arrogant*, *selfish*, *humble*, *generous*, *successful*, *hard-working*, and *confused*. Also, write each of the words on a poster board or whiteboard in a central location. (This gives students a "word bank.")

Place students into groups of two to four, depending on the size of your group. Fold each piece of paper in half and place it in a bowl, cup, or basket. Shake up the words, then allow each group to draw one. Instruct students to write their own short skit that demonstrates the word they had. Students watching the skits should try to guess which word the performing group drew. Set a time limit of one minute. Whichever group guesses correctly receives a point. If no one guesses correctly, then the performing group receives a point. Bring in a small prize for the team with the most points at the end of the game.

All of these words are a part of today's Scripture. We'll talk about the ways some arrogant people went after God's glory for themselves and how God confused their language and changed their plans. God calls us to be humble, generous, and successful in making Him famous, unlike the people in this passage of Scripture.

Option 2

Ask students to name some people who became famous because of various social media platforms. Instruct them to describe what platform the person used and what kind of content pushed them into stardom. Or allow students to discuss which stars' lives they keep up with and why. (*Tip: The second option may be a better fit if many of your students do not have social media accounts.*) Allow several minutes for discussion, then ask:

- **When have you wanted to become famous? In what way did you want to achieve that fame (social media, acting, singing, etc.)?**
- **Why do you think the idea of being famous is so appealing?**

The people we'll learn about as we study today really liked the idea of being famous. Obviously, they didn't have social media, TV, or music labels back then, but these people were determined to make a name for themselves. So, they built a tower that reached high in the sky. But their plan didn't exactly turn out the way they hoped.

His Story

TEACHING PLAN

At this point in the Genesis account is an interesting story, often called The Tower of Babel. Some time had passed since the judgment and mercy of the flood (discussed in the previous session), but surrounding the flood, humanity was still broken from the inside out. There was still a sin problem because there was still a heart problem. Sin remained in people's hearts after the flood. God knew this was true—the flood was only meant to slow down the progression of sin in the world.

Read Genesis 11:1-4.

This tragic event occurred on the plains of Shinar (modern day Iraq). We need to notice immediately that the people were disregarding God's specific commandments. God had first told Adam and Eve to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). Then after the flood, He gave the same command to Noah and his descendants (Gen. 9:1). God's intent was for His name to be glorified as people filled His creation. Instead, people wanted to build a city and tower for *their* glory and to exalt *their* name, specifically so they wouldn't be scattered throughout the earth.

- **Place students in groups of two to three, and tell them to talk about different ways they see people trying to become popular or famous.**

God isn't against cities and towers, of course, but the architecture itself wasn't the issue that day; it was what was behind the city and tower. It was the wayward heart of humanity. The people wanted to build a city with a tower so high that they would make a name for themselves. Feel the arrogance of this statement. They stood in direct contrast to God's promise to give Abram a great name in Genesis 12. But these people wanted to achieve greatness for themselves. Notice in the last line of verse 4 that they were acting directly against God's good command to fill the earth by wanting to huddle together and build their own kingdom.

- **Worrying too much about grades, regularly posting selfies, and being broken hearted over not making that team are all potential situations when we might be more concerned about our name than God's. What are some additional examples?**
- **How might pursuing a bigger platform or a personal brand be like trying to build our own kingdom?**

The true wickedness of sin doesn't begin with an immoral act; it begins with the heart behind the act. That's why the rebellion of Babel became a picture of mankind's worst wickedness. It certainly didn't look all that bad back on the plains of Shina. But the root was there—a persistent and powerful root called pride. It's the heart that says, "I will," instead of "God's will." When Satan was kicked out of heaven, it wasn't because of sex or violence—it was because of pride (Isa. 14:13-14). Satan has always "followed his heart" and been "true to himself," which is just another way of saying he lives by sin's mantra: "By my will, in my strength, for my glory."

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Sin drives people to seek greatness for themselves instead of for God's glory.

Genesis 11:1-4

11:3. Their sin was an attempt to reach for God, in its own warped way. That's why the text says they wanted to build a tower "with its top in the sky" (11:4). The word for "sky" is the same word for *heaven* in Hebrew. They were trying to get back the belonging, security, and greatness they had in God. Even the name for this tower—Babel (or Babylon)—literally means "the Gate of God."

The problem of sin isn't necessarily that we want belonging, security, or even greatness, but that we look for those qualities in the wrong places. We look to small things like fame or achievement to fill a God-sized void in our hearts. It's no wonder we're unsatisfied.

By my will, in my strength, for my glory in many ways could be the motto of our generation. Self-determination is prized in our society, and we look up to those who exude strength and power. But if that's our attitude, the person in Scripture we most resemble is the devil.

One way to help students understand sin is by looking at the middle letter of the word: *I*. Sin is the great "I" problem. It says, "I want" instead of considering what God wants. It says, "In my strength," instead of relying on God's. And it aims for "my glory and attention," not God's. By my will, in my strength, for my glory.

The question for us is "What's in our hearts?" This isn't a question of how "moral" or "religious" we are. The people building this tower may have believed they were incredibly religious. This is a question of what stands at the core of our hearts—God's will or ours. People can do good things in life—great things—and be completely consumed by pride. Get good grades, by your will, in your strength, for your glory. Be successful, by your will, in your strength, for your glory. Be incredibly religious, by your will, in your strength, for your glory.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 40, DDG)

God's Providence

Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Gen. 8:21-22; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). Christians believe entire universe is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—instead of a hands-off approach to creation—which affects the natural order and the individuals and events within human history.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Genesis 11:5-9.

God had to come down to see the humans' grand initiative. In other words, this tower was only speck in comparison to God's greatness. God didn't judge the people in Shinar because He was threatened by their actions, but because He cared deeply about their hearts. He wanted to slow the spread of sin. And humanity's unified language would have lead to further rebellion against God, if left unchecked.

- **Why might it be better for our plans to fail rather than succeed without God? (Share a personal example to show students how to answer this question.)**

We're building something every day. And we're tempted to build up our treasures in a way that communicates to the world that this is where we find our identity, our joy, and our life. The temptation to "make a name for ourselves" leads us to believe we are at the center of the universe, and we can accomplish salvation for ourselves.

It's good news that God causes idolatrous plans to fail. Time after time, the God who is committed to our good—the God who wants us to find our satisfaction in Him—will slowly strip away everything else in which we try to find joy. Perhaps you've spent years building a reputation that would reach to the heavens. What would it look like for God, in His mercy, to strip away some of the things you find security in?

- **When have you recently done a good job with something difficult? Did you take all the credit for doing a good job or did you glorify God? Explain.**

Remarkably, the Apostle John saw a vision of heaven in which "a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. … And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10).

Activity

Place students into groups of 6-8 and form a large circle. Instruct them to cross their arms at the wrist, and then grasp hands with two people across the circle. All students must work together to untie the knot, while not letting go of other students' hands. After they have untangled the "Human Knot," ask them to keep their hands linked, lean back, and try to sit down and stand back up again as a group. Although you were able to untangle the "Human Knot" after a while, there was no way for us to untangle ourselves from our sin. The knots sin creates in our lives are so complex, only Jesus could untangle them and set us free.

There they are—the scattered nations of the earth, brought back together! But it's the inverse of Babel. Instead of speaking one language, they are speaking many. Yet despite their many languages, they are united in proclaiming the glories of God's strength, not their own.

- **God's way of making us right with Him comes through Jesus. Why is this a better way than trying to get to Him in our own strength and effort?**

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Sin drives people to seek greatness for themselves instead of for God's glory.

Genesis 11:5-9.

11:6-7. The text informs us that God put an end to the building of this tower by confusing the people's language. He could have destroyed the tower, struck the builders with lightning, or caused a massive earthquake. Instead, He confused their languages so that their progress in this evil was stunted.

But there's an element of mercy in this act of judgment; it's a theme we've seen again and again in Genesis.

Lead students to turn to the following sections in their Bibles and discuss the recurring themes they observe.

Genesis 3: Because Adam and Eve sinned, they were judged and banished from paradise. But was this action *only* judgment? No. You see, God could have annihilated Adam and Eve right then and there, but He showed them mercy instead. He sacrificed an animal in order to clothe them, and He promised that a Messiah would be born through the seed of Eve and would crush the head of the serpent.

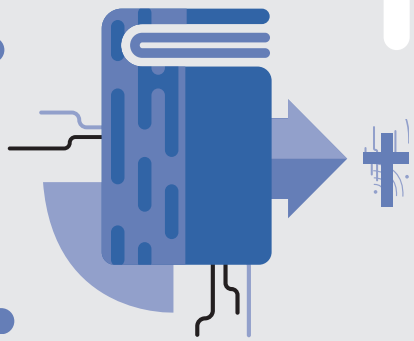
Genesis 4: When Cain killed Abel, Cain was judged and forced to wander. Even here God showed an element of mercy. When Cain expressed his fear of being killed in vengeance, God placed upon him a mark of protection.

Genesis 6–9: When the state of humanity was described as creating new evils with every thought and intent, God brought judgment through the flood. But it wasn't just judgment; He saved a remnant of humanity in the ark.

God continues to show mercy to His children even today. God disciplines us when we sin, but the discipline is good because it is what proves we are His (Heb. 12:5-11). The discipline is merciful because it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness, even if it isn't enjoyable at the time.

(p. 42, DDG) Christ Connection

God confused the language of those who wanted to make a great name for themselves and scattered them. God tore down the language barrier at Pentecost so His people would scatter across the world and make known the great name of His Son. One day, God will gather together people from every tribe and language to worship Him in unity.



SIN AND GOD'S AUTHORITY

Sin drives people to seek greatness for themselves instead of for God's glory.

JESUS CONNECTION

God confused the language of those who wanted to make a great name for themselves and scattered them. At Pentecost (Acts 2), God enabled Jesus' disciples to declare His praise in many languages to show that He wanted the whole world to know the great name of His Son. One day, God will gather together people from every tribe and language to worship Him in unity.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

HUMILITY – Refusing to think of myself as more important than I am.

HEAD

The opposite of humility is pride. In Genesis 11:1–4, how did the people display their pride instead of humility? Be specific.

Even though the people disobeyed God's instructions, His plan endured. What does this tell us about God?

HEART

The Bible is clear that God alone deserves glory, but like the people at Babel, we tend to put ourselves at the center of life. How does prideful thinking steal what belongs to God?

If humility means not thinking of myself as more important than I am, what are some ways we might show that we do think of ourselves as more important than we are?

HANDS

Throughout His life, God's son, Jesus, showed humility by serving others. He washed his friends' feet, fed crowds of people, healed the sick and cared for the poor. Make a list of three specific people in your family, at school or in your community and decide on one way you can humbly serve that person or group. Then, commit to doing those things this week.